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Review of the functioning of the methods of work of the Commission

Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on Population and Development

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note has been prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2015/252, entitled "Future organization and methods of work of the Commission on Population and Development", in which the Council decided that the Commission should review the functioning of its methods of work, with a view to further enhancing the impact of the work of the Commission and its contribution to the Council. In addition, the Council requested that the Secretariat, in consultation with Member States and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), prepare a note for consideration by the Commission at its forty-ninth session on ways and means to achieve those objectives.

In preparing the present note, the Secretariat, supported by the Bureau of the forty-ninth session and by UNFPA, consulted with Member States, relevant United Nations entities and international organizations, and non-governmental organizations having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

The note provides an overview of the current functioning and methods of work of the Commission, presents the findings from the consultation process and puts forward a set of recommendations to strengthen the work of the Commission and its contribution to the Economic and Social Council.

The Commission may wish to consider the recommendations contained in the note in its deliberations on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission during the forty-ninth session.

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I. Introduction

1. The mandate of the Commission on Population and Development derives from General Assembly resolution 49/128, in which the Assembly decided that the Commission would monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development at the national, regional and international levels and would advise the Economic and Social Council thereon. In its resolution 1995/55, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the terms of reference proposed by the Commission in the report on its latest session, and took note of decision 1995/1 of the Commission, by which it transmitted its views to the Council on the implications for the Commission of the follow-up to the International Conference.

2. Such views were included as an annex to the report on the twenty-eighth session of the Commission in 1995. The annex contains a comprehensive overview of the methods of work used by the Commission over the past two decades. Those methods were amended formally by the Commission in its decisions 2004/2 and 2005/2 and resolution 2006/1. Further amendments in practice have followed from General Assembly resolutions 61/16 on 68/1 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council.

3. The present review of the methods of work of the Commission should also take into consideration the recent call by the General Assembly, in its resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", for the functional commissions to support the thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals taking place in the high-level political forum.

4. In addition to the resolutions and decisions cited above, the methods of work of the Commission must be consistent with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council (see E/5975/Rev.1 of 1983).

II. Mandate and terms of reference

5. The Commission, originally named the Population Commission, was established by the Economic and Social Council by its resolution 3 (III) of 3 October 1946 to provide "advice and assistance on matters affecting or affected by population changes". Following the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, the General Assembly decided, in its resolution 49/128, to rename the body the Commission on Population and Development. That decision was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1995/209.

6. In resolution 49/128, the General Assembly emphasized the need for follow-up activities relating to the International Conference and its Programme of Action. To that end, it decided that the General Assembly, through its role in policy formulation, the Economic and Social Council, through its role in overall guidance and coordination and a revitalized Population Commission would constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism that would play the primary role in the follow-up to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

7. In its resolution 1995/55, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the terms of reference proposed by the Commission in its report on the twenty-eighth session

held earlier that year and added one amendment. The amended version reads as follows:

> The Commission on Population and Development shall assist the Council by:
>
> (a) Arranging for studies and advising the Council on:
>
> (i) Population issues and trends, including determinants and consequences;
>
> (ii) Integrating population and development strategies;
>
> (iii) Population and related development policies and programmes;
>
> (iv) Provision of population assistance, upon request, to developing countries and, on a temporary basis, to countries with economies in transition;
>
> (v) Any other population and development questions on which either the principal or the subsidiary organs of the United Nations or the specialized agencies may seek advice;
>
> (b) Monitoring, reviewing and assessing the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the national, regional and global levels, identifying reasons for success and failure, and advising the Council thereon;
>
> ...
>
> (c) Providing appropriate recommendations to the Council, on the basis of an integrated consideration of the reports and issues related to the implementation of the Programme of Action;
>
> (d) Review[ing] the findings of research and analysis pertaining to the interrelationship between population and development at the national, regional and global levels and advis[ing] the Council thereon.

8. By General Assembly resolution 65/234, Member States extended the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation beyond 2014. On 22 September 2014, the General Assembly convened a special session to assess the status of implementation of the Programme of Action and to renew political support for actions required for the full implementation of its goals and objectives. During the special session, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the Programme of Action, noting its continued relevance as well as the findings and recommendations of its 20-year review (A/69/62).

9. In General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, Member States urged the Economic and Social Council to promote the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields. In the same resolution, the Assembly underscored that the functional commissions, when mandated, should continue to have the primary responsibility for the review and assessment of progress made in implementing United Nations conference documents.

10. The role of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies in the follow-up to the major international conferences and summits was affirmed once again in General Assembly resolution 68/1, in which the Assembly called also for the

harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions. In the resolution, the Assembly called attention to the annual theme of the Council and invited the subsidiary bodies to contribute to the work of the Council in keeping with its agreed theme.

11. In its resolution 70/1, the General Assembly tasked the functional commissions with reviewing progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Noting that thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals would take place in the high-level political forum, the Assembly decided that these would be supported by reviews by the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums. Such reviews should engage all relevant stakeholders and, where possible, feed into, and be aligned with, the cycle of the high-level political forum.

III. Consultation process

12. At its first meeting in June 2015, the Bureau of the forty-ninth session endorsed the proposal by the Secretariat that the review of the methods of work of the Commission would be informed by (a) a questionnaire to be sent to all Member States; (b) informal meetings with regional groups; and (c) at least one informal meeting open to all Member States. Furthermore, the Secretariat would consult with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) throughout the process of review and would invite inputs from other relevant United Nations entities, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

13. In September 2015, a questionnaire was sent to all Member States. Meanwhile, a smaller set of questions was dispatched to relevant United Nations entities and international organizations. A similar set of questions was made available online to NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council that had registered to attend recent sessions of the Commission.

14. In total, 37 responses were received from Member States. Inputs were also received from four United Nations entities or international organizations and from seven NGOs.

15. Informal meetings with the five regional groups were held in late 2015 and early 2016. An informal meeting open to all Member States, held in November 2015, was attended by around 70 Member States.

16. In addition, the Secretariat met with individual Member States or groups of Member States, upon request. It consulted with UNFPA throughout this process and sought the views of other United Nations entities, international organizations and NGOs. The Secretariat also reviewed the methods of work used by other functional commissions.

17. The present note was prepared alongside the report of the Secretary-General entitled, "Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level" (A/70/684), and has been informed by its findings and recommendations.

IV. Future organization and methods of work

18. The topics for consideration have been organized into five categories. The first set of issues concerns the special theme chosen for each session of the Commission and the sequencing of themes over time as part of a multi-year work programme. The second category includes matters related to a session's organization of work, including the agenda and the scheduling of plenary meetings and informal consultations. The third topic concerns the reports of the Secretary-General prepared for a session, which form the main substantive inputs to the deliberations of the Commission. The fourth topic concerns the outcome of a session and related matters, including the report submitted to the Economic and Social Council. The fifth topic concerns the participation of various stakeholders in a session. Each of the sections below reviews current practices and summarizes major findings from the consultation process, leading to a set of recommendations.

A. Special themes and the multi-year work programme

Selection of special themes

19. To assess the progress achieved in implementing the Programme of Action, the Commission decided in 1995 to adopt a topic-oriented and prioritized multi-year work programme, culminating in a quinquennial review and appraisal of the Programme of Action in 1999. In 1995, the Commission adopted a four-year work programme by selecting special themes for its annual sessions in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 (see the annex to the present report). That decision was subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1995/55.

20. Subsequent work programmes had a shorter time horizon. In 1998, the Commission adopted the theme for a single year, 2000, a practice that was repeated in 1999, when the Commission adopted the theme for 2001. In 2000, the Commission reaffirmed the prior decision on a theme for 2001 and selected special themes for the next two years, effectively creating a three-year work programme. After that, the Commission began to decide special themes two years in advance, a practice affirmed by the Commission in its resolution 2006/1. Since 2014, however, the Commission has been unable to maintain a two-year planning horizon in the selection of special themes, because of the expectation created by the General Assembly, in its resolution 68/1, that the special theme of the Commission would be aligned with the annual theme of the Economic and Social Council.

21. Periodically, the Commission has conducted comprehensive reviews and appraisals of the implementation of the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation. Comprehensive reviews were the subject of the Commission's work in 2004, 2009 and 2014, as reflected in the special themes adopted for those years. In its decision 2005/2, the Commission affirmed the need to hold such periodic reviews.

22. Throughout the consultation process, Member States expressed their continued support for selecting a special theme based primarily on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. For example, 34 out of 37 responses to the questionnaire indicated support for this existing practice. Most responses, 28 of 37, expressed a preference for maintaining the current practice of adopting a special theme and producing a negotiated outcome for each

annual session. Eight responses supported the introduction of a biennial cycle — that is, meeting annually while choosing a special theme and considering a draft proposal for a resolution on the theme every other year.

23. The four United Nations entities or international organizations that responded to the questions on the methods of work agreed generally that the Commission should continue to have as its main focus the review and follow-up of the Programme of Action at the national, regional and international levels. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, the Commission might highlight how progress in implementing the Programme of Action would contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. Some NGOs responding to a similar set of questions concurred that the follow-up and review of the Programme of Action should remain the primary role of the Commission. Several indicated that the choice of the special theme needed to be sufficiently specific and relevant to facilitate focused discussions. In this regard, the Secretary-General's report providing a framework of actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action beyond 2014 (A/69/62) could provide additional guidance in choosing special themes for future sessions of the Commission.

25. In deciding its future organization of work, the Commission may wish to emulate the practice adopted in 1995, when the Commission chose its special themes for a four-year period, creating a balanced multi-year work programme that reflected the substantive breadth of the Programme of Action. The identification of a multi-year work programme may also assist the Commission in planning its work, potentially enhancing both its quality and its efficiency. A four-year planning cycle would be consistent with the periodicity of meetings and review of the 2030 Agenda by the high-level political forum.

Alignment of themes

26. In its resolution 68/1, the General Assembly decided that the Economic and Social Council would invite the functional commissions and other bodies to contribute to its work "in keeping with the agreed theme" of the Council. In resolution 70/1, the Assembly decided that the reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals carried out by the functional commissions would be aligned, where possible, with the cycle of the high-level political forum.

27. It has generally been assumed that the selection of the annual theme of the Council should precede a decision on the special theme of the Commission. That approach, however, limits the options available to the Commission, especially with regard to adopting a multi-year work programme. An alternative approach, offering greater flexibility, would be to allow for the possibility of choosing a special theme for the Commission before knowing the Council's theme for a given year, and then adjusting the Commission's work on the special theme to be in keeping with the annual theme of the Council once the latter is known. This approach could be workable, especially if the Council continues to choose very broad themes, or themes based on cross-cutting issues. For example, the Council's theme for 2016 is "Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitment to results". The Commission's work on a wide variety of special themes could be shaped so that it would be in keeping with such a broad theme.

B. Organization of work

Agenda items

28. The main elements of the agenda of the Commission derive from the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council; from General Assembly resolutions 49/128 and 61/16; or from the annex to the report of the Commission on its twenty-eighth session in 1995 (E/1995/27-E/CN.9/1995/8).

29. In recent years, the agenda of a session has generally included the following items:

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters
3. Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development
4. General debate on national experience in population matters on [special theme]
5. General debate on the contribution of population and development issues to the Economic and Social Council theme in [year] on [annual theme of the Council]
6. Programme implementation and future programme of work of the Secretariat in the field of population
7. Provisional agenda for the [next] session of the Commission
8. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its [current] session

30. Whereas the special theme has typically been mentioned only in the title of the item on national experience, the reports of the Secretary-General on the theme, or on population programmes focusing on the theme, have always been presented under the item on implementation. In short, both items have had a thematic focus, with one emphasizing global and regional perspectives and the other, national perspectives.

31. A common view expressed by Member States throughout the consultation process was that the review of the 2030 Agenda should take place in the context of the follow-up to the Programme of Action, in an integrated manner. That perspective was prevalent also in the inputs provided by Member States for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on global follow-up and review (A/70/684). Furthermore, Member States noted that the Commission should support and complement the work of the high-level political forum, and that any duplication should be avoided.

32. Around three quarters of Member States responding to the questionnaire, 27 of 37, indicated a preference for an integrated review and follow-up of both the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda as part of the debate on the special theme. Eleven of the Member States responding favoured adding a separate agenda item dedicated to a review of the population-related topics of the Sustainable Development Goals. While some NGOs preferred an integrated review of the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda, others recommended creating separate agenda items dedicated to each.

33. The Commission may wish to maintain the distinction between global and regional perspectives in one item and national perspectives in the other. Agenda item 3 could retain the title it has had in recent years (see para. 29 above), emphasizing that the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development remains the foundation of the work of the Commission. In that context, the review of the Sustainable Development Goals, in contribution to the work of the high-level political forum, could be addressed as a sub-item of agenda item 3.

34. The Commission may wish to reconsider agenda item 5 on the contribution of population and development issues to the annual theme of the Economic and Social Council. The current item 5 was part of an attempt to link the work of the functional commissions to the annual ministerial review of the Council, which ended in 2015. Maintaining a separate agenda item for this purpose seems contrary to the objective of having an integrated consideration of the Council's annual theme in the work of the Commission. In future sessions, the annual theme of the Council could be explored in relation to the special theme of the Commission under agenda items 3 and 4. Nevertheless, the Commission could retain the option of exploring the contributions of the work of the Commission to the annual theme of the Council as a stand-alone topic by including a sub-item under agenda item 3.

35. The Commission may wish to receive a brief overview of global population trends at the start of each session, perhaps as part of an additional sub-item under agenda item 3. Such an overview is already presented by the Population Division under agenda item 6 every other year, on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General on world demographic trends, which is prepared biennially. In years when the report is not prepared, the Commission may wish to invite the Population Division to make a short, oral presentation outlining key demographic trends under the same sub-item of agenda item 3.

36. On the basis of the considerations above, the agenda of future sessions of the Commission could have the following elements:

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters
3. Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development:*
   (a) Overview of global population trends;
   (b) General debate on implementation;
   (c) Contributions to the review of the Sustainable Development Goals;
   (d) Contributions to the [year] theme of the Economic and Social Council**
4. General debate on national experience in matters of population and development*
5. Programme implementation and future programme of work of the Secretariat in the field of population
6. Provisional agenda for the [next] session of the Commission

7. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its [current] session

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* Discussions under agenda items 3 and 4 will focus on the special theme of the [current] session on [special theme].

** The Economic and Social Council has chosen [annual theme] as its annual theme for [year].

Duration and timing

37. Since 1996, the Commission on Population and Development has met once a year, normally for a period of five working days, which is consistent with its decision 1995/1. In recent years, the Commission has started informal consultations on the outcome during the week prior to the start of the plenary session.

38. While Member States expressed satisfaction with the overall length of the plenary session of the Commission, they advised against holding informal consultations in parallel with the plenary meetings. In this regard, Member States welcomed the efforts during the forty-eighth session to avoid scheduling conflicts, which allowed delegations, especially smaller ones, to attend both the plenary meetings and informal consultations. Minimizing the overlap between the two schedules was seen as highly valuable in the light of the substantive connections between the deliberations taking place in the plenary meetings and in the informal consultations.

39. Member States had differing views on the length of the informal consultations. Roughly 60 per cent of Member States responding to the questionnaire, 22 of 37, expressed a preference for starting the informal consultations during the week prior to the plenary session. However, other countries cautioned that adding more time for informal consultations may not, in and of itself, resolve differences with regard to issues for which consensus is lacking or increase the chances of a successful outcome. Very few responses, 3 of 37, indicated a preference for starting the informal consultations two or more weeks before the opening of the session.

40. Some Member States asked for clarification about the costs associated with the practice in recent years of starting the informal consultations a few days prior to the opening of the plenary session. Since meeting rooms for the consultations are allocated on an "as available" basis, and since there have been no requests for interpretation, this practice has not generated additional costs in relation to conference servicing.

Other matters related to the organization of work

41. Several Member States supported adding a ministerial segment to the annual session of the Commission so as to encourage high-level political participation and increase public attention to critical issues in relation to population and development. Others noted, however, that a ministerial segment would increase the burden on smaller delegations, which would need to support their senior officials, while at the same time attending plenary meetings and side events and participating in informal consultations.

42. More than 80 per cent of Member State responses, 30 of 37, indicated support for the use of national presentations as a means to review and follow-up the Sustaining Development Goals. Such presentations could be supported by reports on national experience prepared by Member States.

43. Some delegations suggested that the Commission should give greater emphasis to new and emerging issues, allowing the Commission to respond better to issues requiring urgent consideration. Such deliberations could be supported by papers prepared on an ad hoc basis by the Secretariat or by experts. Other delegations cautioned that an agenda item on new or emerging issues could lead to a narrow focus on crisis situations or on issues deemed too controversial for consideration as a special theme.

44. To strengthen the technical content of the discussions taking place in the Commission, some Member States proposed holding workshops or side events with expert panels, within existing resources, prior to the meetings of the Commission.

C. Documentation

45. In its report on its twenty-eighth session in 1995 (E/1995/27-E/CN.9/1995/8), the Commission called for the preparation of the following reports: (a) an annual report on world population monitoring, coordinated by the Population Division; (b) a report of the Secretary-General on the monitoring of population programmes, coordinated by UNFPA; (c) a report of the Secretary-General on the flow of financial resources allocated for implementing the Programme of Action, also coordinated by UNFPA; (d) a report of the Secretary-General on progress of work in the field of population for the corresponding biennium, prepared by the Population Division; and (e) a note by the Secretary-General on the proposed programme of work for the corresponding biennium, prepared by the Population Division. Furthermore, in its resolution 1996/2, the Economic and Social Council suggested that global demographic trends, in addition to being included in the report on world population monitoring, be the subject of a dedicated report prepared biennially by the Population Division, starting in 1997.

46. In addition to the reports mentioned above on substantive issues, the documentation for annual sessions of the Commission includes various documents of a procedural nature, including the provisional agenda, the organization of work and the report of the Bureau on its intersessional meetings. The present note considers only the substantive reports mentioned in the previous paragraph.

47. The titles of the first two reports, as indicated in the provisional agenda of the annual session, have evolved over time. In recent years, they have been as follows: (a) Report of the Secretary-General on [special theme]; and (b) Report of the Secretary-General on the monitoring of population programmes, focusing on [special theme]. While both reports address aspects of the special theme, the first report presents an overview of the topic from a global perspective, while the second report addresses the operational and programmatic challenges of implementation at the national level in relation to the special theme.

48. During the consultation process, Member States expressed their satisfaction with the reports of the Secretary-General and other documentation prepared for annual sessions of the Commission. Of the 37 Member States responding to the questionnaire, 29 expressed satisfaction with the report of the Secretary-General on world demographic trends; 26 indicated that Member States were satisfied with the reports on the special theme, on the monitoring of population programmes, and on the work of the Secretariat in the field of population; and 25 expressed satisfaction with the report on the flow of financial resources.

49. Some Member States recommended that the reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the Commission should focus on gaps in implementation and lessons learned and should include concrete recommendations to guide the informal consultations on a resolution on the special theme. Several countries stressed that these reports should be balanced, evidence-based and concise. The various reports should complement each other and duplication should be avoided.

50. Roughly 70 per cent of Member States responding to the questionnaire, 26 of 37, indicated that the review and follow-up of Sustainable Development Goals relating to population should be integrated into the existing reports of the Secretary-General, while fewer than half, 16 of 37, expressed support for adding a report of the Secretary-General dedicated to the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. Several Member States cautioned that preparing separate reports, one on the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and another on the follow-up and implementation of the Programme of Action, would be contrary to the unified and integrated agenda that should guide the future work of the Commission.

51. In responding to the questions, three of the four United Nations entities or international organizations emphasized the importance of including contributions from the United Nations system in the reports of the Secretary-General. Inviting inputs from a wide range of entities of the United Nations system and from other key partners would ensure that these reports present the knowledge and perspectives of a wide variety of stakeholders, while broadening the scope of the deliberations of the Commission.

D. Outcome and reporting

52. In resolution 2006/1 on its methods of work, the Commission decided that the outcomes of the discussions of the Commission, including on its special theme, where possible and appropriate, should contain substantive recommendations for furthering the implementation of the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation. In practice, the recommendations of the Commission, on the special theme or other topics, have been in the form of a negotiated outcome. The outcome document is included as part of the report sent to the Economic and Social Council after the close of the session.

53. Rule 37 of the rules of procedure specifies that the Commission shall submit a report to the Council on the work of each session. The report should contain a concise summary of the recommendations and a statement of issues requiring action by the Council, and it should frame its recommendations and resolutions, as far as practicable, in the form of drafts for approval by the Council. In its resolution 68/1, the General Assembly in 2013 called for the subsidiary bodies to include in their reports an executive summary, clearly identifying the conclusions, recommendations and issues that might require attention and/or action by the Council.

54. After the procedural part of the draft report is presented to the Commission during the final meeting of an annual session, the Commission typically adopts the draft report and entrusts the Rapporteur to finalize it with the support of the Secretariat. Without prejudice to the negotiated outcome, the Commission could in the same manner authorize the Chair to prepare an executive summary of the substantive deliberations of the session, which would become part of the report.

55. The report of the Commission to the Council has provided mostly factual information about the session, including its organization of work, procedural decisions including election of officers, and the list of speakers for each agenda item. The substance of the session included in the report has consisted mainly of a negotiated outcome on the special theme, if any, brief summaries of keynote addresses and panel discussions, and summaries of the reports of the Secretary-General that were submitted to the Commission. The report has rarely contained substantive contributions by Member States other than those contained in the resolutions and decisions adopted by the Commission. During the forty-eighth session in 2015, when Member States did not reach consensus on a draft resolution on the special theme, the Commission authorized the Chair to include in the report a summary of the discussions on the proposed outcome document.

56. The final report is presented by the Chair to the Economic and Social Council during its coordination and management meeting. Prior to 2015, this presentation was made by the recently elected Chair of the following session. In 2015, the Bureau decided that the Chair of the recently concluded session should present the report, ensuring that each Chair presents to the Council the report on the session over which he or she has presided.

57. Throughout the consultation process, most Member States expressed support for a continuation of the current practice of considering draft proposals for a resolution on the special theme in every year. Almost 80 per cent of the Member States responding, 29 of 37, expressed support for having a negotiated outcome of each annual session. One argument put forward by those in favour was that a resolution, while non-binding, contributed to policymaking at the country level, informed other international debates and demonstrated political commitment. By continuing the practice of adopting a resolution on the special theme, the work of Commission would remain action-oriented and policy-relevant.

58. Some NGOs, as well, asserted that negotiations were a key component of the work of the Commission and of paramount importance for maintaining and upholding the political commitment by Member States to the full implementation of the Programme of Action.

59. Some Member States recalled that the rules of procedure include provisions allowing members of the Commission to vote or to express reservations about specific parts of a resolution, if consensus on its entirety cannot be achieved. In fact, Member States have frequently made use of their right to make oral statements before or after the adoption of a negotiated outcome. Such reservations are included in the report on the session and posted on the website of the Commission.

60. Several of the Member States responding, 14 out of 37, expressed support for a Chair's summary as an outcome of the deliberations of the Commission on the special theme, while another 14 expressed opposition. Member States in favour of a Chair's summary observed that such an outcome allowed for an in-depth reflection and stocktaking, and was well suited to identify gaps in the implementation of and follow-up to the Programme of Action. Those opposed argued that the process of preparing a Chair's summary lacked transparency and that the resulting document did not carry the same weight as a negotiated outcome.

61. The outcome of an intergovernmental conference or meeting often takes the form of a Chair's summary when a negotiated outcome is not deemed feasible.

Nevertheless, the two mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. For example, following resolution 2015/6 of the Economic and Social Council on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, a Chair's summary is the outcome of the discussions on the review theme and other topics, but not on the priority theme of a session. These summaries communicate valuable information on the deliberations of the Commission and serve as a complement to, not a substitute for, the negotiated outcome on the priority theme.

62. In accordance with resolution 68/1, and without prejudice to the negotiated outcome, the Commission may wish to include an executive summary in its report to the Economic and Social Council. The executive summary could provide input to the high-level political forum in support of its thematic reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals. Following the practice in the Commission on the Status of Women, the executive summary could be prepared under the authority of the Chair, in consultation with the regional groups through the members of the Bureau.

63. During the consultation process, Member States expressed satisfaction with the practice of the Chair circulating draft resolutions and decisions well in advance of the start of informal consultations and requested a continuation of this practice.

E. Participants, roles and responsibilities

64. Following decision 1995/320 by the Economic and Social Council, the membership of the Commission has consisted of 47 Member States, including 12 from the African States, 11 from the Asian States, 5 from the Eastern European States, 9 from Latin American and Caribbean States, and 10 from the Western European and other States. In its resolution 1995/55 on the implementation of the Programme of Action, the Council decided that government representatives nominated to serve on the Commission should have the relevant background in population and development. In its resolution 2006/1, the Commission invited Member States to consider including technical experts in matters of population and development in their delegations.

65. The Bureau of the Commission is tasked with planning the annual session of the Commission and making proposals for its programme of work. Since 1967, the Bureau has consisted of five persons, one from each of the five regional groups. Following its decision 2004/2, the Commission has elected the Bureau of a session immediately upon the closure of the previous session. This practice has the advantage of allowing the new Bureau to oversee the preparatory work of the Commission during the period between sessions. In keeping with Commission decisions 2004/2 and 2005/2, the role of Chair rotates though the five regional groups.

66. In its decision 1995/1, the Commission decided that the Under-Secretary-General of the predecessor of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the parent department of the Population Division, would have responsibility for servicing the Commission. It observed that the Population Division was the body with the competency to cover the monitoring and appraisal of the broad range of areas covered by the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Furthermore, the role of the Commission as the governing body for the Population Division was affirmed (see E/1995/27-E/CN.9/1995/8, annex I).

67. While acknowledging the secretariat role of the Department and its Population Division, the Commission recognized, in decision 1995/1, that other United Nations bodies, including the regional commissions and agencies, had the leading role in critical areas of national, regional and programmatic implementation of the Programme of Action and should be given appropriate responsibility for providing the relevant information to enable the Commission to make informed judgements about progress. In this regard, it was essential that UNFPA in particular would collaborate closely with the Population Division.

68. In its resolution 1995/55, the Economic and Social Council invited the Department and other relevant organization and bodies, in particular the United Nations Population Fund, to work closely in the preparation of reports for the Commission. In addition to preparing two reports of the Secretary-General for the annual session of the Commission, UNFPA participates as an observer in the meetings of the Bureau.

69. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management provides the Commission with technical support for meetings management and documentation. The Secretary of the Commission, from the Department, gives procedural advice to the Bureau and members of the Commission and ensures the smooth functioning of the session on the basis of the rules of procedure.

70. The Commission, in its decision 2005/2, encouraged the United Nations regional commissions to plan their activities with a view to contributing to the work of the Commission. In doing so, they should collaborate, as appropriate, with other regional or subregional intergovernmental organizations as well as with other entities of the United Nations system. Since 1995, regional commissions have regularly participated in the annual sessions of the Commission, making statements during the agenda items on implementation of the Programme of Action, on national experiences in population matters or on the work of the Secretariat in the field of population.

71. Over the years, the Commission has invited experts as keynote speakers and panellists. In decision 2005/2, the Commission decided to promote increased sharing of national, regional and international experiences through focused and interactive dialogues among experts and practitioners. In resolution 2006/1, the Commission suggested the use of keynote speakers and experts on the special theme to address the challenges of implementing the Programme of Action.

72. In decision 1995/1, the Commission encouraged the participation of intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and international financial institutions, which should be invited to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the Programme of Action to the maximum extent possible. In its resolution 1996/31, the Economic and Social Council stipulated that NGOs that have been granted general or special consultative status may participate as observers at public meetings of the functional commissions. These organizations may submit written statements relevant to the work of the Commission on Population and Development, of which the first 20 received by the Secretariat become part of the official documentation of the session. Time permitting, they may also make oral statements during the session.

73. In their responses to the questionnaire, Member States emphasized the crucial role of the Bureau, which prepares the annual sessions of the Commission, including plenary meetings and informal consultations. The active engagement of all five regional groups before, during and after an annual session was seen as

crucial to advancing the debate on the follow-up and implementation of the Programme of Action and would also be essential in the contribution of the Commission to thematic reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals.

74. Around two thirds of Member States responding to the questionnaire indicated satisfaction with the participation of keynote speakers and panellists during recent sessions of the Commission. Some Member States encouraged the use of interactive formats for these segments, as well as the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders and the participation of youth and other interested groups.

75. Nearly two thirds of the Member States responding favoured the idea of strengthening the technical content of the deliberations taking place in the Commission, including by increasing the participation of the regional commissions and UNFPA country offices. Several Member States welcomed the increased participation of technical experts, who could be included as part of national delegations. There was also support for increased participation by national ministries, other functional commissions, relevant United Nations entities and civil society.

76. A majority of Member States responding, 28 out of 37, conveyed support for the practice of inviting civil society representatives to take the floor, time permitting, following Member States and observers during the consideration of relevant agenda items. Twenty of those responding expressed support for organizing interactive panel discussions that include representatives of civil society. More than half of the Member States responding, 20 of 37, supported the idea of organizing informal civil society days prior to the session and reporting on these during the session. Some specified that such events should be organized using existing resources and platforms for the participation of civil society.

77. Three of the four United Nations entities or international organizations responding emphasized the importance they placed on participation in the annual session of the Commission. Possible mechanisms included oral or written statements under relevant agenda items, and participation in panel discussions and side events. One entity suggested promoting the participation of other multilateral bodies or forums, as they could bring expertise and insights to the discussions of the Commission.

78. Some NGOs encouraged Member States to include representatives of civil society in their national delegations and recommended the inclusion of civil society representatives in expert panels.

V. Recommendations

79. **Discussions within the General Assembly on the methods of work of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum in the context of the 2030 Agenda are ongoing, in particular with regard to the selection of annual themes and the specification of a multi-year cycle for the thematic reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals. The recommendations offered below may need to be revisited once the Council and the Assembly have completed their work on these matters.**

A. Special theme and multi-year work programme

80. **The Commission may wish to continue the current practice of selecting a special theme for each annual session of the Commission, based primarily on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation, while also taking into account those elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pertaining to issues of population and development. The debate on the special theme should combine a review and follow-up of the relevant sections of the Programme of Action and related elements of the 2030 Agenda in a unified and integrated manner, as part of a single debate.**

81. **The Commission should choose the special theme of its annual session as part of a multi-year work programme. The selection of themes over the years should reflect the breadth in scope of the Programme of Action. Keeping in mind the four-year cycle of the high-level political forum, the Commission may wish to adopt a four-year work programme designed to cover the substantive topics of the Programme of Action and the related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda over a four-year cycle in an integrated manner.**

82. **The debate on the special theme should consider how to accelerate implementation of the Programme of Action, and how implementation may contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and vice versa. The Commission should strive to provide guidance to Member States on actions needed to achieve the objectives of the Programme of Action, as well as those Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda that are most relevant to the work of the Commission.**

B. Organization of work

83. **The Commission should continue its practice of including two agenda items devoted to the consideration of the special theme. The first item would include a general discussion of the topic, focusing on actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels. The second item would be a general debate on national experience in matters of population and development. The main contribution of the Commission in support of the thematic reviews of progress taking place in the high-level political forum would derive from the discussion of the special theme under these two agenda items.**

84. **The Commission may wish to establish a sub-item, under the agenda item on implementation of the Programme of Action, devoted to a review of global population trends. The report of the Secretary-General on world demographic trends would be submitted under this sub-item.**

85. **The Commission should continue its practice of inviting experts and practitioners to inform the deliberations during annual sessions, through keynote presentations and panel discussions, which should be interactive and include representatives of civil society.**

86. The Commission should encourage Member States to make national presentations, including on their progress in implementing the Programme of Action and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as part of the general debate on national experience in matters of population and development.

87. The Bureau should propose an organization of work that seeks to minimize the overlap between plenary meetings and informal consultations. Plans for scheduling informal consultations ahead of the plenary session should be communicated well in advance.

88. To strengthen the technical content of its deliberations, the Commission may wish to request the Secretariat, in collaboration with UNFPA and other relevant stakeholders, to continue to convene expert meetings and informal technical briefings on the special theme prior to the session.

C. Documentation

89. Reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the Commission should be balanced, evidence-based and concise. Duplication between reports should be avoided. Both the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNFPA should invite relevant stakeholders to contribute to the preparation of the reports.

90. The substantive reports should include a discussion of gaps in implementation and lessons learned, and should propose concrete recommendations to inform the negotiations on draft proposals. In keeping with the unified and integrated agenda, the review of the 2030 Agenda, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, should be covered within the existing reports.

D. Outcome and reporting

91. The Commission should reaffirm that the outcome of its deliberations should contain substantive recommendations for furthering the implementation of the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation.

92. The Commission may wish to affirm that a negotiated outcome is the preferred form of its recommendations, and that the Bureau, assisted by the Secretariat, should take the necessary steps in preparing the session to facilitate the achievement of a successful outcome.

93. In addition, the Commission may wish to acknowledge the value of an executive summary of the deliberations of the Commission, prepared by the Chair, in consultation with the regional groups through the members of the Bureau. The Commission may wish to authorize the Chair to include such a summary in the report on the session, for submission to the Economic and Social Council and transmission to the high-level political forum as a contribution to the review of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets related to the special theme of the session.

E. Participants, roles and responsibilities

94. **The Commission may wish to encourage the regional groups to nominate their representatives by no later than the last day of an annual session, so that the election of Bureau members for the next session at the closure of the current session can proceed on schedule, ensuring that all regional groups will be represented throughout the process of preparing the next session.**

95. **In order to bring regional perspectives into the discussions, the Commission may wish to encourage the regional commissions of the United Nations to continue to contribute to the work of the Commission, in collaboration, where appropriate, with other intergovernmental organizations, especially regional organizations, and other United Nations entities.**

96. **The Commission may also wish to encourage the active participation and contribution by national ministries, including technical experts, by relevant entities of the United Nations system, by NGOs with accreditation of the Economic and Social Council, by international and regional financial institutions, by other functional commissions, and by other multilateral bodies and forums.**

Annex

Special themes of the Commission on Population and Development, 1996-2016

Year	*Special theme*	*Chapter(s) of Programme of Action*	*Year decided*
1996	Reproductive rights and reproductive health	VII	1995
1997	International migration and development	X	1995
1998	Health and mortality	VIII	1995
1999	Population growth structure and distribution	VI, IX	1995
2000	Population, gender and development	IV	1998
2001	Population, environment and development	III	1999
2002	Reproductive rights and reproductive health, with special reference to HIV/AIDS	VII, VIII	2000
2003	Population, education and development	XI	2000
2004	Review and appraisal of the progress made in achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development	All	2003
2005	Population, development and HIV/AIDS, with particular emphasis on poverty	III, VII, VIII	2003
2006	International migration and development	X	2004
2007	The changing age structures of population and their implications for development	VI	2005
2008	Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development	IX	2006
2009	The contribution of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals	All	2007
2010	Health, morbidity, mortality and development	VIII	2008
2011	Fertility, reproductive health and development	VII	2009
2012	Adolescents and youth	VI, VII	2010
2013	New trends in migration: demographic aspects	XI, X	2011
2014	Assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development	All	2011
2015	Realizing the future we want: integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda	All	2013
2016	Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015 development agenda	XII	2015